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ABSTRACT

Two studies examined turnover among newly hired residential direct support workers in community homes serving people with developmental disabilities. In Study 1, 110 community homes for people with mental retardation in Minnesota were surveyed for facility and residential characteristics, direct support worker wages and benefits, recruitment and retention outcomes, factors associated with turnover, strategies to address staffing challenges, and supervisor suggested changes. Study 2 involved 5 surveys of 124 newly hired direct-support workers at homes that had been previously surveyed. Workers were surveyed regarding worker characteristics, direct support worker outcomes, reasons for wanting to leave, workers' recommendations to agencies, the most difficult aspects of direct support work, and workers' recommendations for potential direct support workers. Findings of the two studies indicated an average turnover rate of 46-48 percent over two years. Factors affecting recruitment and retention outcomes included the length of time a particular home had been in operation, severity of residents' disabilities, and the tenure of the home supervisor. Recommendations to address recruitment and retention challenges are offered for the application process, for the period of worker entry into the organization, for the period of organizational socialization, and for ongoing strategies. (Contains 37 references.) (DB)

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Report 50
August 6, 1997

Research and Training Center on Residential Services and Community Living
Institute on Community Integration (UAP)

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A Longitudinal Study of Turnover Among Newly Hired Residential Direct Support Workers in Small Community Homes Serving People with Developmental Disabilities: Summary Report

Report 50
August 20, 1997

By

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Janet Bast, Stacey Tytler-Moore, Erin Simond, and Lynda Anderson collected data, updated the project's data base, organized and recorded incoming surveys, typed and organized all of the quantitative responses to surveys, and regularly contacted the homes in the study. Amy Hewitt insisted that qualitative questions would be valuable, and she was correct. Nahoon Kwak developed system files for this project and provided general statistical support, and Cheryl Morgan, Laura LaFrenz, Jennifer Sandlin, and Linda Schaffer provided timely secretarial support.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are at least 305,000 paid full-time equivalent direct support positions in institutional and community residential settings for people with developmental disabilities in the United States. Nationally, in 1992 direct support workers earned an average wage of $5.97 per hour in private residential programs and $8.56 per hour in public residential settings (Braddock & Mitchell, 1992). National studies have found annual turnover rates for direct support workers in community residential settings ranging from 34% in small publicly-operated homes to 70% for small privately-operated homes, with most estimates of turnover rates in the 50%-70% range (Braddock & Mitchell, 1992; George & Baumeister, 1981; Lakin & Bruininks, 1981; Larson & Lakin, 1992). With these turnover rates, at a national average cost per hire of $1,388 for non-exempt workers (JWT Specialized Communications, 1996), the cost of replacement staff could be as high as $2.1 to $2.9 million per year.

While staff turnover may produce both positive and negative outcomes, when turnover rates exceed 50% per year as they do in community residential settings, the problems presented outweigh the potential benefits. Confirmation that turnover rates are cause for concern for community residential settings comes from many sources. High turnover of direct support workers a concern of consumers (Whiteman & Jaskulski, 1996), parents (Jaskulski & Whiteman, 1996; Larson & Lakin, 1991), community members (Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities, 1992), other direct support workers (Larson & Lakin, 1992), program administrators (Bruininks, Kudla, Wieck, & Hauber, 1980; Larson, 1997), human services researchers (e.g., Braddock & Mitchell, 1992; Jacobson & Ackerman, 1989; Lakin & Bruininks, 1981; Zaharia & Baumeister, 1978), and policy makers (e.g., Department of Employee Relations, 1989).

Compounding the difficulties created by high turnover rates are increasing difficulties in recruiting replacement staff. Several reports have identified high vacancy rates and related recruitment problems for community residential settings (Coleman & Craig, 1981; Jaskulski & Metzler, 1990; Larson & Lakin, 1992; Larson, 1997; Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, 1989; Task Force on Human Resources Development, 1989). For example, in Minnesota an estimated 11.9% of direct support worker positions in residential service settings were vacant in August 1996 (Larson, 1997). Residential agency administrators reported that the average position was vacant for 2.7 weeks before being filled, and that when they advertised vacancies only 7.3 applicants on average replied. Those administrators also reported that finding qualified staff members was their most difficult staffing challenge (71% reported it was a problem).

In recent years, finding direct support workers has become more difficult due to several demographic and labor market trends. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that by the Year 2005, the number home health aides will increase by 138% to 827,000, the number of human service workers will increase 136% to 445,000, the number of teachers aides and assistants will increase 4.1% to 1.3 million, and the number of personal and home care aides will increase 130% to 293,000 (Leftwich, 1994). In

addition, other service related industries ranging from telemarketing to hospitality are growing rapidly. For every ten newly created jobs in the United States, eight are projected to be service-oriented. However the proportion of the U.S. population ages 18-44 (those who have historically been most likely to be direct support workers) is projected to drop from 42.4% to 37.5% between 1995 and 2005 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). Clearly recruitment and retention of community residential direct support workers is important both in research and in practice.

METHODOLOGY AND STUDY RESULTS

This study examines turnover among newly hired residential direct support workers through both facility level and individual employee level analyses. In Study 1, facility level analyses describe participating homes, examine turnover rates, and identify variables associated with facility level turnover. In Study 2, individual level analyses describe individual staff characteristics and identify individual and job-related factors associated with turnover decisions. This summary reviews the methodology and results for each of these studies and then presents a combined discussion. Appendix A contains tables summarizing the results of both studies.

Study 1: Facility Analysis

Methodology

One hundred twenty-eight of 188 agencies providing residential services to people with mental retardation in Minnesota in 1993 were screened for participation in this study. Of the 128 agencies screened, 94 (73%) were eligible for the study based on either being part of the Minnesota Longitudinal Study (a deinstitutionalization study also conducted by the University of Minnesota), or providing 24 hour residential services to people with developmental disabilities in at least one home with six or fewer residents. Administrators in 83 of the 94 eligible agencies (88%) agreed to participate in the study.

Homes were selected for the study using a two-phase process. In the first phase, supervisors of all State-Operated Community Services (SOCS) homes from participating Regional Treatment Centers's, and supervisors of all homes in the Minnesota Longitudinal Study (see Hayden, DePaepe, Soulen & Polister, 1995) were invited to participate. In all, 110 homes were invited to participate based on being part of the Minnesota Longitudinal Study or being a SOCS home. Of these homes, 54 that served six or fewer people are included in this report.

In the second phase, homes from agencies not in the Minnesota Longitudinal Study that provided 24 hour supports to six or fewer people with developmental disabilities were considered eligible. One home was randomly selected from each agency that agreed to participate in the study. In all, 56 homes were selected through this process.

Supervisors in 143 of the 166 homes selected in phase one and phase two (86%) agreed to participate in the study. Of the 110 homes included in this analysis, 54

homes were selected in the first phase and 56 homes were selected in the second phase.

Two facility surveys were completed by participating supervisors between December 1993 and December 1996. The first survey was administered when the home entered the study. The second survey was administered twelve months after the first survey was returned in homes still in the study at that point. The facility surveys requested information about facility characteristics, staffing patterns, general staff characteristics, recruitment and retention challenges and characteristics of the people living in the home. A short form of the facility survey was used to gather basic information from supervisors unwilling or unable to complete the regular Time 1 or Time 2 facility survey.

Supervisors in 143 homes competed the Time 1 survey and supervisors in 101 of 108 homes still in the study at Time 2 completed the Time 2 survey (94%). Among the 110 homes included in this analysis, Facility Time 1 surveys were available for 110 homes, Facility Time 2 surveys were available for 80 homes, and Facility Short Surveys were available at Time 2 for 16 homes.

Results

Facility Characteristics. Of the 110 small group homes included in this analysis, 43 (39%) were funded by the Medicaid Intermediate Care Facilities for [persons with] Mental Retardation program, and 67 (61%) were funded by the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver program. The average home opened in 1990 and served 4.7 people with developmental disabilities. The average cost per day per resident in these homes was $170 including all room and board charges. Just over half of the homes (52%) were located in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area while the rest were in out-state Minnesota.

Resident Characteristics. The people living in the participating homes could be characterized several ways. Most had severe or profound mental retardation (64%) and more than half (55%) had moved from a state institution to this home directly. More than half had a specific intervention program to address challenging behavior, and one fourth (26%) had a formal diagnosis of mental illness in addition to mental retardation.

Direct Support Worker Wages and Benefits. Direct support workers earned, on average $7.07 per hour starting wages, with the highest wage in each home averaging $9.27. Of all direct support workers in these homes, 43% were considered to be full-time, 58% were eligible for medical or dental benefits, and 72% were eligible for paid leave time (holidays, vacations, paid leave).

Recruitment and Retention Outcomes. Supervisors reported that recruiting qualified workers was the most common staffing problem (reported by 57% of supervisors), followed by staff turnover (44%), and staff motivation (37%). Annual turnover rates averaged 46% for direct support workers and 27% for supervisors. Among the direct support workers who left the home during a 12 month period, 45% left within six months of hire, and another 23% left between six and twelve months after hire. Only 32% of those who left had more than 12 months tenure in the home. Turnover and difficulties caused by turnover were measured twice in each home. While the average turnover rate did not change

significantly from Year 1 to Year 2 (46% versus 48%), the difficulty caused by turnover increased significantly during that period ($F = 4.19, p < .05$) from 2.8 to 2.6 (1 = very much, 4 = very little).

Factors Associated with Turnover. While the rate at which workers left the organization did not differ over time or based on the type of facility, several other factors were associated with facility level turnover rates. Variables with significant correlations with turnover at Time 1 included the population of the county in which the home was located ($r = .20, p < .05$), supervisor tenure in the home ($r = -.23, p < .05$), the proportion of direct support workers eligible for paid leave ($r = -.34, p < .01$), and the number of direct support workers promoted in the previous year ($r = .34, p < .01$). Turnover at Time 2 was significantly correlated with starting pay for direct support workers at Time 1 ($r = -.28, p < .01$), and supervisor tenure in the home at Time 1 ($r = -.24, p < .05$).

Two blocks of variables were tested to determine their contribution to explaining the variability in turnover rates. The first block included context, facility and resident characteristics that could affect turnover. The second block included staffing patterns and strategies. A multiple regression analysis accounted for 34% of the variability (26% adjusted) in turnover rates at Time 1 using variables including: unemployment rate, county population, average cost per resident, years home was open, ICF-MR status, resident case mix score, starting pay for direct support workers, whether live-in staff were used, the tenure of the supervisor in the home, and the percent of direct support workers eligible for paid leave ($F = 4.07, p < .001$). Unique contributions to explaining the variability in turnover rates at Time 1 were made by resident support needs, starting pay for direct support workers, supervisor tenure in the home, and the proportion of direct support workers eligible for paid leave.

Strategies to Address Staffing Challenges. Supervisors were asked to rank the importance of strategies they used to address staffing problems in their homes by identifying the five most important strategies they used. The most frequently identified strategies included encouraging team work among staff members (80% of all homes), managing fairly/treating staff members fairly (65%), communicating clear, understandable program objectives and agency philosophy (61%), establishing effective communication among staff members (45%), and using clear and understandable job roles and responsibilities (34%). Providing realistic job information was a priority strategy for only 25% of the supervisors.

An exploratory analysis was conducted to learn whether the strategies considered most important for addressing recruitment and retention challenges were associated with actual turnover rates in the homes at Time 1 and Time 2. Differences in turnover rates between homes in which the supervisors did or did not select each of the most popular strategies were tested using One-way Analysis of Variance. The use of direct observation to provide realistic information to recruits, and the selection of providing realistic information about the job to applicants as an important strategy were also tested. Of the top management practices identified by supervisors, only one was related to turnover. Supervisors who valued managing in a fair manner/treating workers fairly worked in homes with

significantly lower turnover rates (40%) than supervisors who did not select fairness as a priority strategy (56%) ($F = 6.16$, $p < .05$).

Interestingly, homes that used direct observation RJPs and homes that reported providing realistic information to recruits as an important technique had significantly higher turnover rates than the other homes (51% vs 38% for homes using direct observations vs homes that did not, $F = 3.84$, $p < .05$; and 61% vs 40% for supervisors reporting realistic information as an important management strategy versus supervisors that did not, $F = 7.54$, $p < .01$). It could be that supervisors in homes with higher turnover rates were more focused on the recruitment process and direct observations because recent leavers said the job was not what they expected, or it could be that an emphasis on realistic job previews is associated with less focus on strategies associated with lower turnover rates.

Changes Impacting Outcomes. Supervisors were asked to describe any changes that had taken place in the agency or in their house that might have had an impact on staffing outcomes. Of the supervisors who identified specific changes, the most common changes reported were a new supervisor was introduced into the house (12% of all homes), the house had staff recruitment or retention problems such as a lack of qualified applicants (10% of homes), the support needs of residents changed (9%), and hiring or recruitment practices such as changing advertising strategies, using realistic job previews, or changing the person responsible for hiring new workers changed (8%). Other changes mentioned included improvements in staff training, improvements in management practices, changes in wages and benefits, and agency expansion.

Factors Related to Turnover (Supervisor Reports). Supervisors identified several factors that they felt influenced staffing outcomes. By far the most common factor was wages and benefits for workers (reported by 32% of all supervisors). Other important factors included flexible or fluctuating hours (14%), problems with team work or worker participation (14%), having mature, dependable workers (13%), providing good training (13%), providing consistent, effective communication for workers (12%), providing a fun or positive work environment (11%) and using innovating recruitment practices (11%). Other factors mentioned by more than one supervisor included the skills and characteristics of residents, fair treatment of employees, support and recognition for workers, supervisor training, qualifications, and style, clear expectations, and agency practices such as opportunities for advancement, location, and retention experience.

Supervisor Suggested Changes. Supervisors suggested ways the agency could make their job better. By far the most common response was to provide more or better training for supervisors (reported by 21% of all supervisors). Other common responses included improve agency communication (13%), use supportive management practices (12%), and improve wages and benefits for workers and supervisors (9%). Other responses offered by more than one supervisor included help with time management, hire additional support staff, support supervisor decision making, reduce documentation requirements, address funding and budgeting issues, improve training for direct support workers,

provide incentives for workers, and improve work space for supervisors

Study 2: Study of Newly Hired Direct Support Workers

Methodology

Five surveys were administered to up to three newly hired direct support workers in participating homes supporting six or fewer residents. The first survey was completed at hire and gathered information about personal characteristics, education and experience, job expectations, employment context information (such as quality of other job offers), and job characteristics. The second survey was completed 30 days after hire and gathered information about job characteristics (such as hours worked and salary), work-related characteristics (organizational commitment and job satisfaction), supervisor characteristics, employment context, training needs and open-ended information about the job and how it could be improved. Two supplementary surveys were completed at the time of the second survey. One was the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire, and the other was the Organizational Socialization Survey.

The third and fourth surveys gathered updated information about job characteristics (such as hours worked and salary), work-related characteristics (organizational commitment and job satisfaction), supervisor characteristics, employment context, training needs and open-ended information about the job and how it could be improved. The third survey was administered after six months on the job and the fourth was administered after 12 months on the job. The final survey requested information from exiting employees about the person's leaving (e.g., was it voluntary, where did they go), and about the good and bad aspects of the job. These surveys were administered in writing and were returned in sealed envelopes directly to the investigator. Supervisors completed an exit survey for direct support participants who left their position during the study.

A total of 174 of 333 direct support workers who were invited to participate in the study agreed (52%). Of those, 124 were included in this analysis. Those included in this analysis were new to the home and to the agency at the time they started. All direct support worker participants worked regularly scheduled shifts (as opposed to on-call) at the home, and worked in homes supporting six or fewer residents.

Results

Direct Support Worker Characteristics. Newly hired workers in this study were predominantly female (81%) and were an average of 28.8 years old at hire. Newly hired workers were overwhelmingly white (96%), unmarried (75%), with no financial dependents (76%). New hires had an average of 1.9 years of experience in developmental disabilities and had completed one and a half years of post-secondary education at hire. More than half (51%) of new hires had never worked in developmental disabilities prior to taking this job. Approximately one-third (37%) of all new hires had taken a course on mental retardation, and 20% were currently enrolled in a post-secondary educational program.

Direct Support Worker Outcomes. Of the 124 new hires in this study, 33%

remained stayed in the same position for 12 months, 3% were promoted, 11% moved to another home in the agency, 38% left voluntarily and 15% were terminated within 12 months of hire. An analysis of 58 workers who stayed 12 months and 47 workers who left revealed that stayers were significantly more likely than leavers to have heard about the job from inside sources (such as current or past staff members, family members or friends) than outside sources (such as newspaper advertisements or employment agencies). Stayers were also significantly more likely to think they had a chance for a promotion than were leavers. Stayers had significantly lower intent to leave, higher organizational commitment, fewer unmet expectations, and higher extrinsic satisfaction than leavers. Overall, 26% of the variability in staying or leaving was accounted for by organizational commitment, met expectations, alternative job opportunities, current salary, job satisfaction, supervisor structure, recruitment source, hours per week, months in field, age at hire, and intent to leave.

Reasons for Wanting to Leave. Workers identified several types of incidents that made them want to leave the home or quit the job. More than half of the workers (51%) said there were no incidents that made them want to leave, and another 23% did not respond to the question. Of those who did identify issues, the most common incidents were problems with co-workers such as staff talking behind each other's back (17%), inadequate pay, benefits, or incentives (16%), problems with supervisors (13%), and scheduling problems (13%).

Recommendations for Agencies. When newly hired direct support workers were asked what agencies could do to make their job better, the most common response was to increase or improve pay, benefits or other incentives (37%). Another 33% of workers said no changes were needed because the employer or supervisor was doing a good job already. Other common suggestions included asking the supervisor to be more personable and attentive and to do a better job managing the home (17%), or to give the workers more, better or different hours (17%).

Most Difficult Aspects of Direct Support Work. New workers also identified the hardest part of starting their job. Workers reported they had difficulty getting to know the people in the home and their behaviors and traits. This response was reported by 45% of all new hires. Another common response, reported by 43% of new hires, was that learning the routines and duties was difficult. A smaller, but still substantial minority of new workers reported having difficulty getting to know and get along with other staff members (20%) and adjusting to the work schedule, particularly for those who worked overnight or early morning shifts (14%).

What Potential Direct Support Workers Should Know. The final question asked of new workers was what he or she would tell their best friend if the friend were thinking about applying for a job at this home. Workers mentioned several positive and challenging job features. Among the challenging job characteristics mentioned were challenging behavioral or medical needs (25% of workers), the need to work varying hours that included weekends and evenings (25%), and difficult or different duties such

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as cooking, giving medications, and providing transportation in the company vehicle (23%). The most common positive characteristics mentioned included that the job was rewarding (19%), the work environment was good (19%), you have to be responsible and mature but can have fun (17%), and you will need lots of patience (17%). Study participants also advised potential workers to learn what duties are involved, be responsible and mature, be patient, and treat each person with dignity and respect.

DISCUSSION

The direct support worker turnover rates in 110 small group homes for people with developmental disabilities in Minnesota, averaging 46-48% over two years, were slightly lower than the reported national averages of between 50% to 70% annually (Larson, Hewitt & Lakin, 1994). They were much lower than the crude separation rate of 67% reported for 25 randomly selected Minnesota community residences in 1992 (Braddock & Mitchell, 1992). But by the standards of virtually any industry, the rates are still very high, and they remain at levels that preclude adequately stable direct support for persons in small residential settings. In addition, many new hires were fired (15%). This termination rate remains identical to the one first reported for community residents nearly a generation ago (Lakin, 1981). Furthermore, recruitment problems, which were mentioned as "a" problem in past research, were viewed by these supervisors as "the" problem. Supervisors reported that difficulty finding new workers was their number one agency management problem.

This study identified several factors that make a difference in recruitment and retention outcomes for small group homes. One factor was the length a particular home has been in operation. For example, ICF-MR certified homes in this study, which opened much earlier than the HCBS Waiver funded homes had significantly less turnover among direct support workers within the first six months of employment, had significantly higher average tenure and hired significantly fewer new workers in a one year period. In addition, the average tenure of workers increased significantly overall between Time 1 and Time 2 in both types of settings. Both findings are consistent with previous studies, which identified length of operation as an important factor influencing turnover rates (e.g., Lakin, 1981).

It takes time for an agency to recruit and train a stable cadre of workers for a new home. Since the number of small group homes nationally continues to expand rapidly (from 41,826 homes in 1992 to 78,365 homes in 1996; Prouty & Lakin, 1997), turnover challenges associated with opening new group homes and building a cadre of stable direct support workers are likely to continue as community supports continue to expand. Consequently, as new small community residential options are developed, it continues to be important to identify and implement strategies to reduce turnover, especially during the first few years of operation of a new program. For individual organizations, pacing new developments may be important to avoid experiencing such "growing pains" at large numbers of an agency's sites. Spacing the development of new services appears particularly important

in areas where unemployment is low, other job opportunities are high, and where wages and benefits in other service industries are highly competitive. Other strategies to reduce the effects of initially high turnover rates on agencies and the people they support suggested by this research include using some of the agency's established core of long-term employees from other sites (both supervisors and direct support workers) in new sites, increasing the proportion of positions offering full-time hours and benefits, and integrating a comprehensive program of recruitment and retention strategies into an agency's personnel practices. Elements of such comprehensive programs are identified in this report.

Resident characteristics appeared associated with direct support worker turnover when both were measured at the same time. Homes that served individuals with more challenging needs (in level of mental retardation, challenging behavior, mental health issues, or assistance with activities of daily living) tended to have higher turnover rates. As community homes are planned for people with more substantial support needs, particular attention should be paid to factors that minimize the turnover of workers. But personnel practices that adequately support direct support workers are needed irrespective of the needs of the people they support.

The tenure of supervisors in the home is a third factor related to turnover and retention of staff. Homes that had newer supervisors had higher turnover rates and lower average tenure than homes with more tenured supervisors. This is partially explained in that the maximum time a supervisor could have been in many homes was limited because many homes had opened within the last five years. However, supervisor tenure maintained its association with direct support worker turnover even after taking into consideration how long the home had been open. When supervisors were asked to identify factors that influenced direct support worker retention, the most commonly mentioned was supervisor turnover. In the facilities surveyed, the turnover rate for supervisors was 27% over a 12-month period.

The role of supervisors in affecting retention of direct support workers appeared very important in this study. Both staying and leaving direct support workers identified their supervisors as a key factor in leaving or wanting to leave the agency. Fair management practices were the second most common strategy identified by supervisors to address staffing problems. Direct support workers reported that having a competent supervisor was a very important expectation when they started their new jobs. Turnover rates were significantly lower in homes where the supervisors considered managing fairly to be one of their top five management practices. When supervisors were asked how the agency could help them do a better job they requested training, improved communication, fair management practices by the agency, and support from the agency for staffing and recruitment issues. In developing interventions to address direct support worker recruitment and retention, the tenure, skills, and performance of supervisors were all important considerations.

It is, of course, impossible to overlook the importance of pay, benefits, paid leave and promotional opportunities for the recruitment and retention of direct support workers. Not only did starting pay account for a significant portion of the variability in

turnover rates at the agency level, but stayers were significantly more likely to report they thought they could get a promotion than leavers. Both direct support workers and their supervisors identified pay as a top factor influencing recruitment, retention, and plans to stay in the home. The availability of other jobs with better pay, working conditions or other conditions of employment was a significant predictor of whether direct support workers would stay or leave. Improving salaries, promotional opportunities and benefits for direct support workers is fundamental to increasing the stability of directs support workers.

The relationship between direct support workers and their colleagues emerged as an important issue in the qualitative data collection. Both supervisors and direct support workers reported that a sense of team work and positive relationships among direct support workers were important to overall staff retention. Among supervisors, it was tied for second among the factors viewed as influencing successful recruitment, retention and training. Stayers identified problems with coworkers as the most common type of incident that made them want to leave. Leavers also reported that problems with coworkers had influenced their decision to stay or leave. Several workers complained that their coworkers gossiped about them, that competition between workers in different shifts was a problem, or that poor performing coworkers made their job more difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study and a review of 1,000 other studies, strategies to address recruitment and retention challenges were reviewed and discussed. Suggested strategies included selection and recruitment changes, orientation and socialization practices, mentoring and training programs, and ongoing strategies such as enhancing the status of workers, training supervisors, and evaluating recruitment and retention outcomes (see Table 1). This summary briefly reviews strategies in each of these categories. A complete literature review and extended discussion of these strategies can be found in the full-length report (Larson & Lakin, 1997).

Table 1
Strategies to Address Recruitment and Retention Challenges

During the Application Process

- Selection strategies
- Recruitment sources
- Recruitment strategies: Realistic Job Previews

During Organizational Entry

- Orientation strategies: Structured orientations
- Initial socialization: Realistic orientation programs

During Organizational Socialization

- Peer mentoring
- Competency-based staff training

Ongoing Strategies

- Enhancing the status of and opportunities available to direct support workers
- Developing links with higher education
- Staff development for supervisors
- Ongoing internal evaluation of efforts

Strategies for the Application Period

Selection Strategies. Several strategies can be implemented before a worker is hired to improve recruitment and retention experiences. Selection is the process used by organizations to improve matches between employee skills and organizational job requirements (Wanous, 1992). In this study, the rate of firings for new hires of 15% by the end of one year is an indication that improvements in selection practices could be helpful. Potential employees need to know specifically the criteria for disqualification for employment so that they do not invest their time applying for a job they will not be allowed to keep. Selection practices need to exclude workers who will be subsequently disqualified from employment because of their background check. Additional expense could be saved by recruiting new workers in anticipation of openings so that the background checks could be completed by the time the person is needed. This strategy has the additional benefit of reducing overtime costs incurred when positions are vacant for long periods.

Another selection strategy that may be helpful in helping recruits to assess their own suitability for a job and in assessing the recruit are structured interviews. Structured interviews are based on a thorough job analysis that specifies critical factors in success on the job. One type of structured interview, patterned behavior description interviews, uses critical incident methodology to identify important job dimensions and to develop a scoring guide based on examples that illustrate the range of excellent to poor performance. Then sets of questions are developed to probe the applicant's background and experience for specific examples of how that person handled situations similar to those he or she might face in the position that is open (Wanous, 1992). Once a specific example has been identified, the interviewer probes to gather the details about the situation, how the person responded, and the outcome. Responses are scored with guidelines developed using the critical incident reporting technique. Structured interviews may be especially helpful in identifying how a recruit handles conflict with coworkers or supervisors.

Recruitment Sources. The pool of potential applicants for direct support work is not growing rapidly enough to provide an adequate supply of qualified workers. More effective recruitment efforts are clearly needed. Possible strategies include developing a volunteer program for students to introduce them to human services work; developing consortia of service providers in a geographic area to join recruitment efforts so that the field becomes more visible in the community; and developing specific recruitment materials such as brochures or videotapes that could be viewed by targeted pools of potential recruits in high school and college classes, job centers, employment agencies and community centers (e.g., Hewitt & Larson, 1996); and developing public service announcements.

Recruitment incentives can also be helpful. Using incentive programs that pay bonuses when a new hire finishes a predetermined number of months on the job or a per recruit signing bonus for current workers can increase recruitment from inside sources. Besides increasing the number of recruits, incentive programs involving recruitment by current employees have the added benefit of recruiting people who were

more likely to stay for at least 12 months (i.e., those recruited from "inside sources").

Recruitment Strategies: Realistic Job Previews. Realistic job previews are a refined recruitment technique that assist in recruiting people who will stay on the job and perform it with personal satisfaction because they have a "realistic" impression of the job before they accept it. Developing and instituting a realistic job preview involves several components including: developing a good concise job description, examining turnover history in the home/agency, gathering house-specific information about the organizational climate including positive and negative job characteristics, summarizing the information, identifying a format to present the information to applicants, and implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of the RJP. The challenges for supervisors in small group homes are to systematically identify information not already being effectively communicated, to incorporate new methods to distribute that information, and to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts. Presentation formats for RJP's include inviting prospective employees to a meal or recreational activity at the home, showing interviews of consumers, parents and staff members about the home, showing a videotape of the regular house routines, scripted oral presentations, tours or work samples when people are home, and volunteer or internship opportunities

This study provided information that can be used to guide the development of RJP's. For example, direct support workers reported that the things that made them want to stay were the people in the home - both the residents and their coworkers, and the rewards of being needed. Some employees found the ability to tailor hours to their needs a positive aspect of the work. Others appreciated being a valued member of a team. Among the challenging aspects of the job for some workers were physically demanding resident behavior, low pay and inadequate benefits, problems with their coworkers and supervisor, and limited opportunities for advancement. Providing accurate information about these issues to new recruits early in the application process is an essential part of the recruitment process.

Strategies for Organizational Entry

Orientation Strategies. The most difficult job components for new workers in this study as they started their jobs were becoming acquainted with the residents, learning the routines, developing relationships with coworkers, remembering training information, and adjusting to the schedule. Many expressed concern about fulfilling the substantial responsibilities given to them. The experience of entering a new organization is stressful for all workers, but is made more so when responsibility is high and direct expert support and supervision is limited as is increasingly the case in small community service settings. Agencies can help by communicating that the struggles facing the newcomer are typical and by providing specific suggestions about how to handle the stress they may experience. A successful orientation program will reduce the anxiety of new employees and make them feel a part of the organization, promote positive attitudes toward the job and the organization, establish open communication between the organization and the employee, communicate the expectations the organization has regarding performance and

behavior, acquaint new employees with organizational background, goals, philosophies, management styles, structure, products and services, and present information on organizational policies, procedures, compensation practices, and benefits (Holland & George, 1986). Providing planned opportunities for new workers to get to know other workers and the people they will be supporting before the first solo shift can be helpful in the orientation process. Pacing the information provided during orientation can also help to reduce the likelihood that a new worker will become overwhelmed with the information.

Initial Socialization.

Deinstitutionalization has led to widespread decentralization of services and supports. Workers who previously would have had many coworkers at the same site now may be the only worker at the site at certain times or may have only one co-worker. However, this shift has produced new demands, challenges, and stressors for direct support workers. It is a particular challenge to develop strategies to support workers who are in scattered sites. People need to know how to get help and to feel confident that the help they need will be available. Providing such critical information and comforts is an important part of the initial socialization process. Some agencies enhance initial socialization efforts by introducing new workers to all of the homes in a geographic area so that there is always someone to call for advice or assistance.

The findings of this study also suggest that it is important during the initial socialization period to provide team building opportunities so that newcomers can feel integrated into the social environment of the home and agency. Considering that workers in some homes enjoyed their colleagues while others wanted to leave because of their coworkers, attention to team building and dealing with differences and disagreements among coworkers is important at the beginning of employment and on an ongoing basis.

Strategies for Organizational Socialization

Peer Mentoring. Peer mentoring strategies link new employees with more senior direct support workers to help in socialization to the job, and in developing or practicing specific skills needed for the job (Hewitt, Larson, Ebenstein & Rose, 1996). Peer mentoring can reduce isolation of direct support workers and increase supports. It can also allow supervisors to delegate the tasks of answering routine questions about the job. Peer mentors benefit by developing a broader understanding of the work and of their co-workers.

Competency-Based Training. Training of new direct support workers is important because it is a direct regulatory mandate for most human services agencies (Larson, Hewitt & Lakin, 1994), it is considered a key element in achieving higher quality services (Alpha Group, 1990; Fiorelli, Margolis, Heverly, Rothchild & Krasting, 1982), it provides the opportunity to learn critical job functions, develop new skills, and cope with job roles (Camp, Blanchard & Huszczo, 1986), and it develops attitudes and skills among employees that affect the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities (Jones, Blunden, Coles, Evens & Porterfield, 1981). A study of 1,736 new hires in different organizations suggested

that workers who complete more weeks of training (Mean = 4.5 weeks of training for workers who stayed more than seven months) had significantly lower turnover than workers in agencies with fewer weeks of training (Mean = 1.9 weeks of training for workers who voluntarily resigned) (Wanous, Stumpf & Bedrosian, 1979). Voluntary leavers also were less likely to receive informal job training (19.6% for leavers versus 43.1% for stayers).

Ongoing Strategies

Enhancing the Status of and Opportunities Available to Direct Support Workers. Some efforts to enhance the status of and opportunities available to direct support workers can be made at the agency level through reorganization that flattens agency hierarchy, through restructured wage packages that offer at least pro-rated paid leave time for all workers, and through flexible paid leave time and benefits policies that allow workers to use those benefits as needed in their own particular circumstances. Other efforts require systemic change. New employment benefits may be needed. Some of these could be developed in conjunction with public agencies. These might include tuition credits at public colleges, universities and technical schools. Alternatively, tax credits can be developed to allow retirees on Social Security to benefit from employment in supporting people with disabilities. Even with these changes, however, public attitudes about the value of direct support workers as expressed in public policies about funding for residential services must change if large scale improvements are to be made.

Another way the status of direct support workers can be improved is through providing staff development and career advancement opportunities. In this study, stayers were significantly more likely to think promotional opportunities were available to them than were leavers. Providing employee bonuses for skill development, promoting workers from within, providing educational benefits, and developing career ladders are all important to improving the stability and quality of the direct support workforce.

Developing Links with Higher Education. The Kennedy Fellows Mentoring Program, developed by John F. Kennedy Jr., provides scholarships and career mentoring to direct support workers enrolled for at least six credits in two New York colleges (Hewitt, Larson & Ebenstein, 1996). This program encourages direct support workers to complete a two-year degree, and helps them become eligible for promotions to positions with greater responsibility. Fifteen other states have federally funded Training Initiative Projects designed to identify, develop and disseminate state-of-the-art training curriculums, provide technical assistance and training to direct support workers, supervisors, agencies, consumers and families, develop career ladder opportunities for direct support workers, complete training needs-assessments, and facilitate collaboration among key stakeholders regarding direct support issues (AAUAP, 1996). These projects reflect the growing national interest in and concern for developing, respecting and supporting direct support workers. They also reflect examples of programs that can increase the visibility of careers in direct support work, and can assist in recruiting new workers to the industry.

Staff Development for Supervisors. This study demonstrated an association between supervisor behavior and recruitment and retention outcomes. Homes with less tenured supervisors had significantly higher turnover rates. Addressing turnover among direct support workers may well begin with success in increasing stability among supervisors of the settings in which they work. Common practices such as rotating supervisors through settings may be detrimental to stability.

Staff development for supervisors is also important. Direct support workers identified having a good supervisor as an important issue, and reported that problems with supervision influenced their decisions to stay or leave. Supervisors also requested assistance. Developing training for supervisors on recruitment and retention strategies, and leadership and supervision skills are important strategies to address recruitment and retention issues.

Ongoing Internal Evaluation of Efforts. It is not sufficient for an agency to have a general idea that they have a problem with recruitment or retention. Agencies need many different types of information to monitor recruitment and retention outcomes and to design effective intervention strategies. The components of a workplace assessment include: developing an accurate job description, examining retention outcomes and recruitment practices, gathering specific information about positive and negative job features, describing any changes or special incentives that may have influenced recruitment or retention, and summarizing the information gathered. More detailed information about developing and using workplace assessments are available from the author.

CONCLUSIONS

This society has made a clear commitment to the presence and participation of people with developmental disabilities in its communities, schools, and work places. That commitment is in jeopardy. Demographic shifts depleting the numbers of young adults, economic growth resulting in increasing jobs and wages, and human service expansion and other factors are making it increasingly difficult to maintain current levels of staff much less to expand the number of staff available to meet needs stemming from future growth. There is a crisis in the community that derives from what has been inadequate attention to the intractable connection between community living for people with disabilities and community supports provided by direct support workers.

The problems of recruiting and retaining direct support workers will continue to demand concerted and creative efforts by public officials, advocates, service providers, and others who care about the well-being of persons with developmental disabilities. Areas of particular focus include increased amounts and attractive options in compensation, more comprehensive and more effective recruitment initiatives, improved quality, recognition and transferability of training, expanded career opportunities, more effective supervision, better matching of employees to work roles, and more effective team building. Success in

these efforts are among the most important components to assuring that community living is a real and viable option for all Americans with developmental disabilities.

We must not encourage the respect and dignity of one group of people (those with developmental disabilities) at the expense of another group of people (those paid to support them). Americans talk often of the importance of having good teachers for our children. We value those who would help children to become productive citizens of this nation. We must also respect those who help and support people with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities.

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APPENDIX A: STUDY RESULTS PRESENTATION HANDOUT

A Longitudinal Study of Turnover Among Newly Hired Direct Support Workers: Final Results and Implications

July 1997

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Workforce Trends in Residential Settings

- Turnover rates average 50%-70% annually
- Vacancy rates 10%
- Recruitment is top staffing problem for administrators
- $1,388 per hire (Ntl.)
- Number of small group homes increased from 41,826 in '92 to 78,365 in '96
- # Human service workers will grow 136% by 2005

MN Longitudinal Staff Study

Facility Analysis

Methodology: Selection of Homes

- Included 83 agencies
- Selected all homes in the MN deinstitutionalization study and all state operated small group homes (54 of 110 included in analysis)
- Selected 56 homes randomly from across the state
- Supervisors in 143 of 166 homes agreed to participate (86%)

Facility Characteristics

• # of homes	110
- ICF-MR	43
- HCBS Waiver	67
• Year opened	1990
• Daily per diem	$170
• Located in Twin Cities	52%
• # residents	4.7

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Resident Characteristics

- Severe or profound mental retardation 64%
- Moved from state institution 55%
- Intervention for challenging behavior 53%
- Formal diagnosis of mental illness 26%
- Walk w/o assistance 67%
- Independent toileting (<1accident/mo.)53%

Salary and Benefits

- Beginning Wage $7.07
- Current Maximum $9.27

- % DSW Full Time 43%
- % DSW w/Benefits 59%
- % DSW w/Paid Leave 72%

Staffing Problems

Problem	*% of Homes*
• Finding qualified staff	57%
• Staff turnover	44%
• Staff motivation	37%
• Wage and hour considerations	29%
• Staff training and development	23%

Retention Problems

Annual turnover rate	46%
% left w/in 6 months	45%
% left w/6-12 months	23%
% left after 12 months	32%
% current staff w/12 months or more tenure***	
Time 1	65%
Time 2	87%

Difficulty caused by turnover*	
Time 1	2.2
Time 2	2.4

(1=very little, 4 = very much)

Average tenure***	
Time 1	19.6 months
Time 2	26.1 months

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Factors Associated w/Turnover

Turnover at Time 1

Difficulty of support needs (+)
Starting pay (-)
Supervisor tenure in home (-)
% dsw eligible paid leave (-)

R^2 = .34***, N = 90

Other Time 1 variables in equation: Unemployment rate, county population, average per diem, years open, ICF-MR status, live-in workers

Turnover at Time 2

Starting pay at Time 1 (-)

R^2 = .27**, N = 90

Other Time 1 variables in equation: Difficulty of support needs, Supervisor tenure in home, % dsw eligible for paid leave Unemployment rate, county population, average per diem, years open, ICF-MR status, live-in workers

Changes Influencing Recruitment Retention or Training

- New supervisor
- Staff recruitment or retention problems
- Change in support needs of residents
- Changed hiring or recruitment strategies
- More or better training
- Changed management practices
- Wage and benefit changes
- Agency expansion

Strategies to Address Staffing Problems

• Encourage team work among staff	80%
• Manage fairly/treat workers fairly*	65%
• Communicate agency philosophy	61%
• Establish effective communication	45%
• Use clear job roles and responsibilities	34%
• Provide competitive pay and benefits	30%
• Provide realistic information to recruits**	25%

* Lower turnover if one of top 5 strategies noted

** Higher turnover in homes that valued this

MN Longitudinal Staff Study

Study of Newly Hired Workers

Methods: Selection of New Hires

- Up to 3 workers per home eligible
- Participants were new to the home and to the agency
- Participants worked regularly scheduled shifts in the home
- 174 of 333 invited from 110 homes agreed to participate (52%)
- 124 of the 174 were included in these analyses

Characteristics of New Hires

- 81% female
- 28.8 years old at hire
- 96% white
- 25% married
- 24% with financial dependents
- 1.9 years in field
- 13.6 years of schooling
- 37% took a course on mental retardation
- 20% currently in vocational/tech. training or college

Survival Rates for New Hires

[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Hire	124	0	0	0	0
0-3	97	1	7	16	11
4-6	70	1	4	8	4
7-9	57	3	0	11	2
10-12	41	2	2	10	3
Total	31%	2%	11%	36%	15%

Recruitment Sources

Inside sources

Referral sources providing inside information not typically available to persons outside the company

- rehires
- referrals
- in-house postings
- volunteers
- staff friends
- family members

Outside sources

Referral sources providing less specific information about the organization as a place to work

- newspaper advertisements
- employment agencies
- job boards and placement offices in high schools and colleges

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Recruitment Source

Source	*Stayers*	*Leavers*
Media Advertisement	31%	51%
Current Employee	43%	21%
Friend in Field	12%	6%
Other	13%	20%
Inside sources*	55%	36%

* $F = 3.77$, $p < .05$

Job Outcomes for New Workers

Outcome	*Stayers* N = 58	*Leavers* N = 46
Salary @ 30 days	$7.38	$6.93
Likelihood of Promotion**	3.0	1.3
Intent to leave**	19.2	25.5
Organizational Commitment***	83.0	74.9
Unmet expectations**	1.6	2.2
Job Satisfaction	80.2	77.0
Intrinsic Satisfaction	48.5	47.3
Extrinsic Satisfaction*	23.5	21.4

* p<.05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Factors Associated with Staying

Significant Predictors

- Organizational Commitment
- Overall Met Expectations
- Alternative Jobs Available

Wilk's Lambda = .737

Chi Square = 21.2, $p < .05$

74% of original cases correctly identified

Other Variables

- Current salary
- Job Satisfaction
- Supervisor Structure
- Inside recruitment
- Hours per week
- Months in field at hire
- Age at hire
- Intent to leave

Incidents that Made You Want to Leave: Stayers

- I don't plan to leave
- Problems with coworkers
- Inadequate pay/benefits or incentives
- Problems with the supervisor
- Scheduling problems
- Behavior of residents
- Dislike duties

Advice to New Recruits: Stayers

- Positive features
  - The job is very rewarding
  - This is a very good working environment
  - Your co-workers can be fun
- Neutral advice
  - Learn what duties are involved
  - Be responsible/mature, have fun
  - You will need patience
  - Treat each person with dignity and respect
- Negative features
  - Resident behavior and medical needs are challenging
  - The hours vary and can be difficult
  - Pay/benefits and chances for advancement are not good
  - Be prepared to handle personal care for men and women
  - Coworkers are difficult

What Could your Employer do to Make your Job Better?

- Increase or improve pay, benefits or other incentives
- No changes are needed
- Be more personable and attentive
- Do a better job managing the home
- Give me more, better or different hours

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